

Mayor concerned Mavrinac Park development is 'too territorial'?

By Brock Weir

A nearly \$1.1 million plan to transform a vacant six acre parcel of land on Mavrinac Boulevard into a neighbourhood park was approved by Council last week, amid worries voiced by Mayor Dawe its development had become a 'territorial' issue.

Council signed off on the plan, which includes extensive green space 'including picnic areas' along with a full-size basketball court, two tennis courts, two pickle ball courts, a playground, shade structures, and significant plantings.

Gone from the picture are parcels of lands which were originally proposed for community gardens, as well as a proposed washroom facility and fitness trail, both of which were nixed by Council as part of last Tuesday's direction.

'I am so glad to see we are finally at this stage and the neighbourhood is going to have a park,' said Councillor Wendy Gaertner, adding her voice against the fitness trail and washroom as those are not normally features in a smaller neighbourhood park. '[A fitness trail] would be lovely, but it is just an increase in service level. I don't think it is wise [or] fiscally responsible.'

While Council generally supported the elimination of a bathroom facility, Councillor Michael Thompson questioned whether a fitness trail, similar to fitness stations and equipment scattered throughout the Sheppard's Bush Trails, should be eliminated as Council aims to become the 'fittest community in Canada' by 2020.

'Council as a whole has made a commitment to physical activity and trying to achieve some lofty goals around sports and recreation,' he said. 'By putting in the fitness trails and the equipment to go with it, it supports some of the strategic objectives we're trying to achieve around sport activity and getting more people from our community out and active.'

Others said their objection to copying that particular feature in Sheppard's Bush was based on personal experience.

'I have never seen anyone use it,' said Councillor Harold Kim. 'My kids have used it, but they really don't use it in the way it should be used, so for those reasons I can't support the fitness equipment.'

Added Councillor Tom Mrakas: 'It is just going to be sitting there. Maybe upon occasion, someone is going to jump on it to see what this thing does, but at the end of the day, if this is how we're going to promote fitness, are we going to be putting this in every park in Town?'

One area of fitness, however, that has shown a demonstrated need is pickleball for older Aurorans. The sport, which is best described as a combination of tennis and badminton, is hugely popular in the senior community and many courts have been provided in and around Town.

Whether or not these two courts should be provided in Mavrinac Park remained a bone of contention.

'Personally, I don't mind having pickleball [here] but from what I remember, the majority of residents didn't seem to want it,' said Councillor Gaertner. 'I think we should go with what the residents want and that is my personal view. I understand the rationale, but this is a neighborhood park and the neighbourhood didn't want pickleball and I think by putting pickleball in here, we might be bringing in people from outside of the community to use the park and we don't want to do that. This truly has to be a neighbourhood park.'

Councillor Sandra Humfries later made a motion to remove pickleball courts from the overall park plan, but this motion was voted down by the rest of Council.

The debate surrounding it nevertheless earned a sharp response from Mayor Dawe, who said while this was indeed a neighbourhood

park, it is a neighbourhood park for the entire Aurora neighbourhood.

'The reason I am against this is becoming very clear with this discussion, because this park has become very territorial,' he said, before finding himself on the losing side of a 7 ? 2 recorded vote in favour of the plan. 'It has become 'my park in my neighbourhood' and nobody else can use it. What would happen if a school had gone in there? How many people would be coming from outside the neighborhood to use that school? Many. We don't put in parks that are simply for someone in a specific area. We put facilities in the Town for everyone to use.

'I am very upset by the concept that it is territorial so it is simply 'my park.' I just think that is wrong, quite frankly. I can't support spending more than \$1 million on this.'

The other vote against the park plan came from Councillor Paul Pirri, who reiterated the opposition he has had to developing this land as a park since the outset.

'I have been opposed to this from the get go,' he said. 'I continue to believe it is a waste of money. It is a superfluous park, it is not needed, and it is not identified in any of our master plans. I don't have anything else to say. I look forward to voting against this because I don't think it is in the best interests of the Town of Aurora.'